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AUTHOR Reynolds, Virginia, Ed.; Brekken, Linda, Ed.
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ABSTRACT

California state law A.B. 2666 requires local educational agencies to provide special education to all children with exceptional needs between the ages of 3 and 5 years. The law aims to reduce the potential impact of handicapping conditions; produce substantial gains in physical development, cognitive development, language and speech development, psychosocial development, and self-help skills development; reduce family stresses; reduce societal dependency and institutionalization; and reduce the need for special class placements for school-age children. This brief guide to the legislation outlines its intent, its implementation, eligibility criteria for services, service providers, program components, educational settings, and service delivery models used to promote integration. The guide concludes with a list of books and articles on early childhood special education and a list of state and local organizational resources. (JDD)

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PRESCHOOL SPECIAL EDUCATION PROGRAM HANDBOOK

MINI-GUIDE

AB 2666 (Hannigan)
(Chapter 311, Statutes of 1987)

Edited by:

Virginia Reynolds, Program Manager, Operations
San Bernardino County Superintendent of Schools Office

Linda Brekken, Ph.D., Coordinator
Personnel Development for Infant Preschool Programs

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650 University Avenue, Room 201
Sacramento, CA 95825
(916) 921-0531

Preschool Program Expansion
AB 2666 Introduction

Legislative Intent:

AB 2666 applies to all preschoolers with exceptional needs and their families. This law establishes standards for all preschoolers receiving special education services and expands the population of preschoolers eligible to be served, under a phase-in plan.

Existing law declares that special education programs shall provide early educational opportunities to all children ages three to five years, who require intensive special education and services.

State law through A.B. 2666 requires local educational agencies to provide special education by June 30, 1991 to all children with exceptional needs between the ages of three and five years, inclusive. This will expand the group of eligible preschoolers by requiring that special education and services be provided to children in that age group who do not require intensive special education and services.

Preschool services for individuals with exceptional needs help enhance intelligence in children; produce substantial gains in physical development, cognitive development, language and speech development, psychosocial development, and self-help skills; help prevent the secondary handicapping conditions; reduce family stress;

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reduce societal dependency and institutionalization; reduce the need for special class placement in special education programs once the children reach school age; and save substantial costs to society and our schools.

Implementation:

The Special Education Division, Infant Preschool Unit of the California State Department of Education is actively working with the field to assist in the implementation of this legislation. The following key concepts are critical to California's expansion of preschool special education programs and services:

* interagency coordination,
* coordinating with community-based preschool programs to promote integration opportunities in age appropriate settings,
* family-focused service delivery model,
* transdisciplinary approaches to assessment and program delivery, and
* staff development to provide opportunities for those working with preschoolers to develop and refine skills in the provision of early childhood special education programs and services.

Technical assistance is available through the Infant Preschool Unit and staff development is available through Personnel Development for Infant Preschool Programs of the Special Education Division.

Who is Served?

A.B. 2666 Applies to All Preschoolers with Exceptional Needs - Preschoolers with exceptional needs are those children three through five years of age, inclusive, who have an identified handicapping condition that requires special education and services which cannot be met by modification of the regular program (regular preschool or home environment) and whose needs are not due to maturational, environmental, cultural or economic factors, unfamiliarity with the English language, temporary physical disabilities or social maladjustment.

There are several ways that preschoolers are eligible for early education services. Services are currently mandated for preschoolers who require intensive special education and services. A new population, as defined in AB 2666, is being phased in over the next four years. The eligibility criteria for these populations are as follows:

A child THREE or FOUR years of age must:

1) require intensive special education per Sections 3030 and 3031 in Title 5 of the California Administrative Code (CAC);

or

2) require special education per Education Code Section 56441.11(c) established by AB 2666.

(continued)

Who is Served?

A child FIVE years of age must require special education per:

3) Section 3030 in Title 5 of the CAC;

or

4) EC 56441.11(c) as established by AB 2666.

If you have questions regarding eligibility for early education services, contact your local Special Education Local Plan Area; county office or school district; or the Infant Preschool Unit, Special Education Division.

Phase In - Preschoolers with exceptional needs who require intensive special education and services (the group meeting eligibility criteria #1 and #3 above) are currently mandated to receive services and are not subject to any phase-in plan. The preschoolers with exceptional needs (who meet the eligibility criteria #2 and #4 above as part of AB 2666) will be part of California's four-year phase-in plan leading to full services for all preschoolers with exceptional needs by June 30, 1991.

Families - Families should be involved as equal partners in all aspects of services to preschoolers with exceptional needs, from initial identification and assessment, individualized education program development, educational programming through transition to another program. Opportunities for active parent and family involvement are a mandated part of early education programs.

Who Provides Services?

Transdisciplinary Team - Preschool special education services are provided by a transdisciplinary team. The transdisciplinary team is a group of professionals and family members who work together to assess, plan and provide early education services to a young child and his/her family. Transdisciplinary team members train team members in their area of expertise and share the responsibility for assessment and implementation of a coordinated "whole child" approach to the educational program. Each professional is committed to incorporating the perspectives and techniques of other disciplines into their own area of expertise. In the transdisciplinary approach, team members are aware of each other's disciplines, yet areas of expertise remain in the discipline of training.

Because a young child's development is overlapping and interrelated, the transdisciplinary team model facilitates the "whole child" approach to service delivery. Professionals work in coordination to provide a total, unified program to the child and family, rather than services and therapies provided in isolation.

The transdisciplinary team approach is characterized by regularly scheduled team meetings, active family involvement in the educational process, and joint planning and implementation of assessment and instructional strategies.

Appropriately Qualified Staff - Preschool special education staff should have training and experience in working with young children with exceptional needs and their families. Staff should have knowledge of normal and atypical development, and skills in working with young children and their families. If staff members do not have such knowledge and skills, staff development activities must be planned to meet individual and team needs. In addition, staff should have knowledge and skills in working with other disciplines as a team member and other agencies and programs to coordinate services.

Who Provides Services?

What Services Are Provided?

Early Education for Preschool Children - Once children are identified as individuals with exceptional needs, **all program options are available to meet the child and family's unique needs.**

Specially designed early education services may be provided to individuals or small groups of children, and include:

* Observing and monitoring the child's behavior and development in his or her environment.
* Providing developmentally and age appropriate activities.
* Interacting and consulting with the family members, regular preschool teachers and other service providers.
* Assisting parents in accessing and coordinating services provided by other agencies or programs in their community.
* Providing opportunities for play, building self esteem and development of preacademic skills.
* Providing access to developmentally appropriate equipment and specialized materials.
* Providing appropriate related services which include parent counseling and training to understand and meet their child's unique strengths and needs.

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What Services Are Provided?

Family Involvement - Family involvement includes a variety of activities individualized to meet each family's unique needs in order to:

* assist families in understanding the importance of early education for the young child,
* provide information on their child's strengths and needs,
* provide support for the family in dealing with the unique needs of the child in relation to his/her family, and
* assist families in accessing and coordinating services needed by the child and family.

Family involvement activities can include: parent education; classroom participation; toys and materials workshops; parent to parent support; parent support groups; sibling support groups; assistance in accessing respite or child care services; lending libraries of toys, books and materials; fund raising activities; social activities; community resource identification and access; family advocacy; parent newsletters; parent orientation to the program; development of parent leadership; and a variety of other activities, identified as needs by program families.

Transition - As children become ready to transition to another preschool program, to kindergarten, or to first grade, they must be reassessed to determine if they continue to need special education and services. As part of the transition process, the IEP team must identify a means of monitoring their progress in kindergarten or first grade. When children exit from special education, their present performance levels and learning styles must be noted and provided to the general education teacher, and support should be provided to the teacher so that the children's gains are not lost.

Where Are Children Served?

State law requires that early education services be provided in an age appropriate setting. Such settings include:

* Regular public or private nonsectarian preschool programs.
* Child development centers or family day care homes.
* The child's regular environment, which may include the home.
* Special sites where preschool programs for both handicapped and nonhandicapped children are located close to each other and have an opportunity to share resources and programming.
* Special education preschool programs with nonhandicapped children attending and participating for all or part of the program.
* Public school settings which provide age-appropriate environments, materials, and services.

NOTE: By law, public special education funds can not be used to purchase regular preschool services.

Where Are Children Served?

How Are Children Served?

Least restrictive environment - The provision of special education services in the least restrictive environment, as required under Part B of the Education of the Handicapped Act, applies to preschool aged children with handicaps who have IEPs and are receiving a free appropriate public education under the provision of EHA-B. Generally, the use of facilities which are separate or otherwise solely devoted to children with handicaps is permissible only when necessary to meet an individual preschool child's specific needs. What is the least restrictive environment for preschoolers with exceptional needs? Because there are no "regular education" programs as we know them for the K-12 population, typical environments for young children are most often the home, child care setting or regular preschool program. Providing special education and services in these less restrictive settings may require modifications in the service delivery to accomodate the unique needs of these young children and their families within community settings.

Flexibility of Service Delivery - The number of days and hours per week that a child receives services are individualized to meet the child's unique needs. Some children may attend a group program five days a week, others may come only three days a week, while still others may receive special services in the regular preschool program or at home for an hour twice a week.

Duration of Group Services - Group services shall not exceed four hours per day, unless otherwise determined by the IEP team.

Ratios - Instructional adult to child ratios for children served in group settings shall be one to six or less depending on the individual needs of the child. For children who are severely handicapped, the instructional adult to child ratio shall not exceed one to five.

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How Are Children Served?

A Variety of Service Delivery Models to Promote Integration - The following are descriptions of programmatic arrangements that can be used to provide age appropriate environments and to facilitate the integration of handicapped and non-handicapped preschoolers.

Co-located Programs - In this arrangement a preschool special education classroom is located on the same site as a regular preschool program. Either the special class can be located at a site where there are multiple preschool classes or a regular preschool class can be located at a site with multiple special education classes, one or more of which may be a preschool special education class. This arrangement provides for an entire continuum of integration opportunities. A child can spend most of the day in the regular class and receive support services, or a child can spend most of the day in special education class and interact with non-handicapped children during scheduled activities. These arrangements can be flexible and adjusted by teachers cooperating to meet the needs of individual children.

Reverse Mainstreaming - This is an arrangement where non-handicapped children are integrated into a special education class. This kind of an arrangement is possible through the co-located programs above, but may also be done in a variety of other ways, as well. Age appropriate siblings, neighbors, or children of staff can be included for part or all of the special class day.

Dual Enrollment - This is a commonly used integration option. In this arrangement, a child attends a special class part of the time and a regular preschool or kindergarten part of the time. Dual enrollment can be done on an AM/PM basis, where the child attends one program in the morning and one program in the afternoon, or it can be done on a three day/two day basis. In choosing this option, IEP teams should be sensitive to the length of the child's day. It is important for both of the programs to

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communicate and coordinate on a regular basis. Coupled with itinerant special services, dual enrollments can be very beneficial to both the child and the program staff.

Individual and Small Group Instruction - Individual and small group instruction is often provided through an itinerant services model in the community preschool program, the child's home or on a school site. These services can be provided by a variety of staff members, based on child and family needs.

Home-Based Service - This is the most "natural" environment for young children. When providing services (either individual or small groups) it is important to emphasize the partnership between parents and professionals in meeting the child's unique needs. Home visitors are guests in the family's environment and must respect the family's culture, values, and childrearing practices and incorporate suggested activities into this framework.

Contracted Services - Contracts or agreements with other agencies are strongly encouraged when these services are currently provided by another agency and are a cost-effective means of providing the services.

Coordination with Other Programs and Agencies
Educational agencies offering similar educational services shall coordinate and not duplicate these services. In order to coordinate with other programs and agencies, it is important to know what community resources are available and how they operate. Of particular importance is the relationship of special education with regular preschool and child development programs.

Collaboration between special educators and early childhood professionals requires learning about each others' programs. Special education staff may want to provide information on programs and services available, as well as

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eligibility, referral and procedural information. For many special educators, entering the world of child development programs will be like entering a different culture. Each program is unique, having a different philosophy, curriculum, funding base and enrollment policy. Special educators might consider the following questions in learning about other programs.

What is the program's philosophy? Not all preschool programs are the same. While most preschools emphasize a child's play as a primary mode of learning, the extent to which teachers provide direct instruction or arrange materials in the environment varies across programs.

What is the program's enrollment policy? Enrollment policies vary from program to program. Some of the questions to ask include:

* What is the program's enrollment process and timelines?
* Are there income guidelines? Are there waivers for special situations?
* Does the program serve children with handicapping conditions?
* Do children have to be toilet trained?
* If we wanted to enroll children with handicaps in your program, which children would be eligible, how many spaces are available, and when would we need to start the process?

How is the program funded? Publicly funded programs such as Head Start, State Preschool and Children's Centers are funded on grants and contracts. Typically the programs receive fixed amounts of money to serve a certain number of children. Private programs are funded on fees, although there may be a few scholarships available.

What Are The Benefits?

A.B. 2666 was passed with the assumption that by providing early education for preschoolers with exceptional needs and their families, the following benefits would occur:

* Significantly reduce the potential impact of any handicapping conditions.

* Produce substantial gains in physical development, cognitive development, language and speech development, psychosocial development, and self-help skills development.

* Help prevent the development of secondary handicapping conditions.

* Reduce family stresses.

* Reduce societal dependency and institutionalization.

* Reduce the need for special class placement in special education programs once the children reach school age.

* Save substantial costs to society and our schools.

As part of the annual evaluation of special education programs, an evaluation will be conducted of the effectiveness of the expanded preschool programs for individuals with exceptional needs between the ages of three and five years, inclusive, who do not require intensive special education and services. The evaluation will be conducted over a five-year period, from the 1987-88 school year through the 1991-92 school year. The evaluation will examine data on numbers and types of pupils who do not enter special education programs at kindergarten, or first grade as the case may be, but who received special education and services in a preschool program.

What Are The Benefits?

References

The following are recommended as important readings to assist in program development:

1. Arenson, B. & Hannaman, B. Hand in Hand: A teacher's guide to preschool mainstreaming. San Diego, CA: Preschool Mainstreaming Project, San Diego Unified School District, 1983.

2. Cook, R., Tessier, A., & Armbruster, V. Adapting Early Childhood Curricula for Children with Special Needs. Columbus, Ohio: Merrill Publishing Co., 1982.

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5. Mori, A. A. Families of Children with Special Needs: Early intervention techniques for the practitioner. Rockville, MD: Aspen, 1983.

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7. Ulrey, G. & Rogers, S. Psychological Assessment of Handicapped Infants and Young Children. New York: Thieme-Stratton, Inc., 1982.

Statewide: Technical Assistance
Infant Preschool Unit
Special Education Division
State Department of Education
P.O. Box 944272
Sacramento, CA 94244-2720
(916) 322-4695

Statewide: Personnel Development
Personnel Development for Infant Preschool Programs

650 University Avenue
Room 201
Sacramento CA 95825
(916) 921-0531

(or)

330 South Oak Knoll
Room 24
Pasadena CA 91101
(818) 792-6816

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